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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 002068

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [BA](#) [POL](#)  
SUBJECT: DEATH OF SENIOR CLERIC BRINGS SHIA OUT INTO THE  
STREETS

REF: MANAMA 2061

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Shaikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri, one of Bahrain's most prominent Shia clerics, died after a long illness December 18, bringing thousands of Bahraini Shia into the streets that same evening and again on December 22 for a funeral procession and graveside ceremony. Al Jamri, whose sons Mansour and Mohammed Jameel are well-known in their own right, as editor-in-chief of Arabic daily Al Wasat and member of parliament respectively, had been quiet the past few years as he struggled with declining health. He gained political prominence as a leading member of Bahrain's first parliament, which convened in 1973. He was also a leader of the Shia movement to promote that community's political rights during the 1990s, which eventually spiraled downward into street clashes, sporadic bombings, mass arrests, torture, and even some detainee deaths. Al Jamri remained adamantly opposed to violence but nonetheless was imprisoned for over three years starting in 1996, spending about one-and-a-half years in solitary confinement. He was released in 1999 by the current King Hamad, who had just ascended to the throne, one day after Al Jamri had been sentenced to serve ten years in prison.

¶2. (SBU) Some 10-20,000 supporters poured into the streets December 18, converging on a highway running near many Shia villages on the northern end of Bahrain's main island for a slow, several-mile funeral procession in the evening. There were no reports of clashes although cement walls lining the route were covered with graffiti saying "Death to Hamad" (the King), "Death to Khalifa" (the Prime Minister), and "Go to Hell Al Khalifa" in both Arabic and English. Property owners quickly painted over the graffiti the next day. A similar number of followers turned out for a December 22 march and ceremony at the Bani Jamra cemetery where he was buried. Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa both paid condolence calls on the Al Jamri family during the three-day mourning period immediately following the death. Shaikh Khalifa publicly called Shaikh Al Jamri "my brother, colleague, and friend."

¶3. (C) Comment: Al Jamri's death comes at a time when leading Shia opposition political society Al Wifaq, having just become the largest political bloc in parliament, has been looking for ways to capitalize on its electoral success and ensure that the government treats it seriously as a political force inside the parliament. Its decision to boycott the opening session of parliament (reftel) was no doubt intended to send the King the message that Al Wifaq must be listened to. Al Jamri's death, and the presence of great numbers of Shia on the streets, only reinforced the message that the Bahraini Shia population does indeed remain

a strong force that cannot be ignored.

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